



City of Somerville

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

NOVEMBER 9, 2021, MEETING NOTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>
Cortney Kirk	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Present</i>
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Present</i>
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>

City staff present: Andrew Graminski (Planning & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm and adjourned at 9:05pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes Approval

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the approval of the August 24, 2021, September 14, 2021, and October 5, 2021 meeting minutes to a future meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC MEETING: 15 Elm Street

(continued from October 12, 2021)

The applicant presented information from their legal interpretation from case law regarding the design review process. The applicant also shared the changes made through the design review process. Changes made included wider façade windows, removal of first floor commercial stairs, and lowered joist for the ground-story commercial frontage.

The Commission felt that the applicant did not supply sufficient materials for the design review and therefore they did not feel it was appropriate to continue the review and vote on the project.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Talun, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to not recommend a preferred façade option.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) that the design guidelines for the MR4 district were not met.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to incorporate additional design guidance provided by the Urban Design Commission at the previous meeting, despite the Commission feeling that the information was incomplete and they could not complete the design review.

RESULT:

NOT RECOMMENDED

PUBLIC MEETING: 16 and 20 Medford

(continued from October 26, 2021)

The applicant team shared that the façade design has been further developed. They explained that the plans still in flux and the design will continue to evolve and be finalized. The proposed drop-off/loading area on South Street has been removed and the underground soil area for street trees has been expanded with the removal of the drop-off zone. Updated landscape plans were presented and explained. Three façade schemes were presented in the same rendering type with no special filter as requested by the Commissioners at the last meeting.

The Commission and applicant team discussed the relationship of the top of the building to its base, the materiality choices in each schemes, and some possible options to help ground the building.

Co-Chair Lewis confirmed that the Commission was leaning toward facade option 1, with the exception of the design of the lower band/canopy in option 2.

The Commission and applicant team discussed how the building should respond to each of the street frontages accordingly; Medford Street is the clear primary, with South Street and Warren Street being secondary streets. They also spoke about how the design guidelines are clear that a minimum amount of materials should be applied and how the design still needs to be tweaked. They touched upon the updated landscaping plan, how the design needs more consideration of materials to create a more harmonious composition, the location and design of the lobby, and the distinction of the corner on South Street.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the design review to a future meeting with the applicant doing a study of combining façade option 1 and 2 by incorporating recommendations and feedback made by the Commission.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to prioritize MR4 design guidelines F, K, and L.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC MEETING: 231-249 Elm Street and 6-8 and 12 Grove Street

(continued from October 12, 2021)

The applicant team presented the revised designs based off the Commission's feedback. New street sections were presented to depict public realm improvements.

The Commission and applicant team discussed the signage plan for the retail tenants, the possibility of simplifying the design of the section of building above The Burren, and the materiality and possible alternatives. The Commissioners agreed that the design has been improved greatly.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to recommend that the CC4 design guidelines have been met.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to incorporate additional guidance into the design.

RESULT:

RECOMMENDED

Member Arbaugh recused himself from the meeting.

PUBLIC MEETING: 350 Assembly Row

The project is proposed at Block 7A in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District. Old zoning (ASMD) governs this project, along with the existing PUD. The proposal is for a 7-story office/lab building with ground-floor retail and below grade parking. The applicant team walked the Commission through building massing approach and façade designs. Public realm improvements were also discussed.

The Commission asked to confirm which design guidelines apply to this project. Co-Chair Lewis confirmed that this project will be straddling two ordinances. The PUD requires that as the project proceeds, design guidelines will be provided. However, in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, there are design guidelines similar what had been produced for the Assembly Special District in Article 7. So, the Commission can review this project based on the building design standards and design guidelines in the current ordinance. Co-Chair Lewis will then have a conversation with the applicant team to confirm that they are indeed meeting the standards referenced in the agreed upon PUD. Design guidelines are required to be created for this block as a condition of the approved special permit for the PUD. These guidelines were not presented to or reviewed by the UDC.

The Commission and applicant team discussed the successful middle part of the façade design, the extremely tall penthouse, how the retail/commercial space does not feel distinct from the rest of the building, and the streetscape design including the lighting plan. The Commission offered a suggestion to shift the horizontal bars to include part of the penthouse to create the illusion that the penthouse height has been reduced.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to continue the design review to another meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

Andrew Arbaugh rejoined meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS: 152-158 Broadway

The applicant team reviewed the material palette for the project to satisfy a condition made by the Planning Board. The Commission questioned why they are not reviewing the material palette in person, as they would like to see a physical mockup. The applicant team made a note that they do plan to make a physical mockup panel and the Commission is welcome to go to site to review the materials when the mockup is complete. The team will inform Co-Chair Lewis when the mockup is complete and she will coordinate with the Commission members.

Planning Director Lewis confirmed that she will write a letter that the condition has been met.

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division at planning@somervillema.gov.